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This report investigates the degree of faculty-student relationship in the small college. In comparing hours per week of discussion with faculty and with peers, it was found that peer groups exert greater influence on students. The generally negative findings, that there is relatively little dialogue going on between students and faculty, suggest that the supposed values of student-faculty relationships in the small college are not necessarily a pronounced advantage. (JC)

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# The Student and His Faculty[1]

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This report focuses on the section of the Experience of College Questionnaire that enquires into faculty-student relationships--or putting it more particularly, on the student's use of faculty as one aspect of his experience of college. There is at least one assumption, and not a very hidden one, behind what follows: most of us, looking back on our own education, would I think admit that we've generally forgotten the content of the courses we took--except, I suppose, those that we're using professionally--but what we still have with us is the feel, the affect, of particular teachers. Some of this comes from the classroom. But the really significant interchanges were out-of-class ones--that may well have started from the comfortable common ground of subject-matter and branched out from there. It may have been no more than what a psychiatric acquaintance calls "a corridor consultation"; or it may have been a real sit-down talk. At any rate, my assumption is that this, what Esther Raushenbush calls "the shared experience," is or could be a significant part of the college experience. As one student said recently: "It's important to talk with faculty who are open and competent--open to what's happening in a student's head." Or as another put it: "You don't want to get mixed up with faculty who aren't going to listen to you." This whole area is excellently documented in Arthur Chickering's forthcoming book Education and Identity.

Given, then, the significance of this area in the educational process and the development of the student, I have tried to trace the major patterns of faculty-student contact as they show up in the Questionnaire. And I have tended to 'accentuate the negative'--to point out the non-contact in order to highlight the gap between what isn't and what could be. For the sake of clarity, median percentages are used, with an occasional illustration of the extremes.

How much do students talk with faculty? The question asked is: "With how many individual members of the faculty or administration have you had conversations outside of class lasting more than five minutes during the present semester?". Half the students say they talked with three to five faculty; one-third talk with two or less, including none. (It should be remembered here that these figures come from all four college years. Presumably older students have come to know more faculty--so the percentages for freshmen would tend to run even higher. And yet this may well be just the time that faculty contact is most needed and could be most helpful.)

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How much talk do they have? Students were asked to "estimate the number of conversations or conferences lasting more than five minutes that you have had . . . outside classes . . . .." Twenty-four percent have had zero to one or two conversations; thirty-one percent have had three to six. Notice that that accounts for a shade over half of the students. A couple of the extremes are interesting here. At Bootstrap College, eighty percent of the students fall into these two categories--suggesting obviously that there is little faculty-student interaction. At the other extreme is Kildew College, which makes a structured attempt to build faculty-student dialogue into its system; here the corresponding figure is only thirty percent. That "only" is somewhat misleading: when a college deliberately sets out to encourage faculty-student interaction, and when nearly half of its students indicate that they have conversations with more than fifteen faculty, then to have thirty percent who have conversations with six or less is something of a failure. It also suggests how difficult it is to be totally perfect!

In another section of the Questionnaire, quite far removed from these items, students were asked: "All in all, in terms of your own needs and desires, how much of the following did you receive during the past year?". One of the "following" items is: "Personal contacts with faculty." Forty-six percent said "Not enough." The extremes are again represented by the same two colleges as before: Seventy-two percent at Bootstrap say "Not enough," and twenty-eight percent at Kildew. The answers to the next item: "How much advice and guidance from faculty and staff" ran parallel but lower: thirty-two percent said "Not enough." In another place in the Questionnaire, a quite substantial group--around ninety percent--indicate that they "Occasionally" or "Frequently" ask a faculty member for advice and guidance. Yet here we seem to have thirty-two percent saying that what they got was not enough.

There is one intriguing direction signal out of this area: Five colleges had the highest number of students having seven or more conversations with faculty; the same five colleges had the highest number who said that their "greatest personal satisfaction during the year" came from "self-discovery, self-insight, and the discovery of new interests and talents"; and two of these five were the highest in saying "just the right amount" personal contact with faculty. One of these two is a non-demoninational 'progressive' college, and the other is church-related, highly structured and a conservative one. And yet each in their own way seems to value highly the human equation, and to live it.

An occasional student, but no more, felt that there was "Too much" personal contact with faculty. It appears, therefore, that there was no sense of faculty interfering and breathing down their necks. Nor is it justifiable to wiggle out of the expressed need for more contact by trying to condemn it as 'coddling'. Clearly the students are asking for more dialogue, more conversation--maybe even more help.

I turn now to the general direction of the talking--how much do the students talk about what? Six areas are specified. Students were asked the amount of time spent on each area with, in the first instance, "that member of the faculty or administration with whom you work out your basic plans for your academic program"--whom I shall call 'The Advisor'; and in the second instance with "members of the faculty and administration in general outside of class"--whom I call 'Faculty in General.' And note that all these "Times Spent" are "during the present semester."

The first area--and these headings are given in full--is "Formal Academic Arrangements--Scheduling, Credits, Requirements, etc." Seventy-eight percent spent half an hour or less with their Advisor, and forty-one percent spent "little or no time" with Faculty in General.

The second area is "Questions and Ideas Concerning Your Plans for the Future, Educational and Vocational." Seventy-nine percent spent half an hour or less with their Advisors; thirty-two percent spent "little or no time" with Faculty in General, while forty-nine percent spent "relatively moderate" with them.

The third area is one of particular concern. It is "Problems and Issues of Immediate Concern in Your Personal Life--Adjustment to Academic Program, Social Relations, Worries, etc." Presumably this is the area in which mostly lies what Robert Nixon calls "the unfinished business" that the student brings with him to college, plus of course the new business that develops while he is in college. Eighty-nine percent spent a half hour or less with their Advisor--and of this group, twenty-one percent spent "a few minutes," and fifty-three percent spent no time at all. The picture with Faculty in General isn't much better: fifty-seven percent say they spent "little or no time", and twenty-nine percent spent "relatively moderate time." This can be said quite sharply in another way: in every college except one, more students spent less time on problems of personal concern than on anything else. The exception, of course, is Kildew, to which I referred earlier. But even here, though forty-five percent spend an hour to several hours in talk with their Advisor, thirty-four percent spend a few minutes or no time at all. At the other extreme, there is another interesting direction signal: there are two colleges that have the largest number of students who spend no time with their Advisor on problems of personal concern; the same two colleges have the largest number of students who are dissatisfied with the non-academic aspects of their college.

On the three remaining areas--general topics in the academic field of the faculty member, campus events and issues, and general conversation either light or serious--not more than twenty-five percent of the students spend any significant amount of time with either their Advisor or Faculty in General. The median figure here masks the upper extremes represented by two colleges where the percentages range in the thirty's and forty's, and in one instance into the sixty's.

There is another area related to all this and to which this is related. Students were asked in which of nine areas they had "received the greatest personal satisfaction" during the past year. One labeled "Self-discovery and self-insight" consistently appeared as a significant response across all the colleges. Along with that, another item indicates that sixty-four percent spent three or more hours a week in bull sessions. Note that this is per week--far more time than is spent per semester in "chewing the rag" with faculty. This suggests what we have always known--that the peer group influence is a major one, and students are getting most of their 'consulting' from their peers. But it also implies--in the light of the assumption with which I started--that colleges need to take deliberate steps to increase the proportion of faculty influence. And as I said earlier, students are clearly asking for something along these lines.

This need shows up very clearly in another way and in another place--in that part of the Attrition Study undertaken by the Project on Student Development that is concerned with the process of withdrawal. The evidence shows that in making the important decision of whether or not to leave college, students simply do not turn to college personnel for advice. They turn to peers and parents, hardly at all to faculty. In fact, they somewhat pointedly seem to make their decision when they are away from the campus. Possibly this has something to do with a sense of distance and perspective; but skilled teaching personnel should be able to help (theoretically!) in getting an even sounder perspective and sense of purpose.

There is further even sadder evidence from another instrument used in the Project study. Students were asked to whom they would turn with "a troublesome problem." On entrance, a percentage say they would turn to a faculty member or advisor or even to the Dean. That percentage decreases as the student moves through college, and even hits zero--especially for the Dean!

The small college should be able to provide a desirable faculty-student contact. It does somewhat, but apparently not enough. And yet this is said to be one of its advantages--and a number of large universities are setting up small college units within themselves. The picture here indicates that smallness is not ipso facto a virtue; one has to work out and work for the things one wants to get at.

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